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Phelps, Edward Bunnell

Infant Mortality

[S.I.]

[1911?]

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Phelps, Edward Bunnell, 1863-1915.

Box 130 Infant mortality [by] Edward Bunnell Phelps ...
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"Address delivered at annual meeting of the
Association of day nurseries of New York city,
January 28, 1910, and reprinted from "American
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Infant Mortality

Edward Bunnell Phelps—Editor and Manager of the American Underwriter.

I HAVE no thought of inflicting on you the dull, dry facts of Infant Mortality statistics, but when we learn that for the last quarter of a century out of every hundred babies born in civilized countries throughout the world at least fifteen died in the first twelve-month, we can scarcely realize the real significance of this appalling fact. In order to visualize it, picture to yourselves a little circle of one hundred baby-carriages, or cots, in each of which is a newly-born baby, and then try to realize that before the end of the year fifteen of those baby-carriages or cots will be empty. If you can draw that picture in your minds, you will, perhaps for the first time, realize the solemn magnitude of the Infant Mortality problem which today confronts the world. To make the significance still clearer, ask yourselves how many of the babies of the people you personally know, and with whom you personally associate, are numbered among those who die within one year after birth. I think your answer will be, practically none. Then taking into account the fact that the average for all newly-born babies—the average, bear in mind—is fifteen deaths for each one hundred born, what must be the infant death-rate among the babies of the poor and wretched? The statistics on that subject are too meagre to supply exact and definite information, but the infant mortality in the case of the so-called lower classes undoubtedly runs up to two, three, four or perhaps five hundred for each thousand births in some instances.

In the formulation and promotion of any particular measure for the betterment of humanity, it is essential to establish, first, the fact—that is to say, the necessity for such a movement; secondly, the why, or apparent causes for that fact; and, thirdly, the how, or most promising means of abolishing those causes. It seems to me that this is the only natural, logical, and thoroughly sane course to pursue in the shaping of any such movement. In the matter of the Day Nursery movement, the primary fact is the enormous infant death-rate throughout the world, a death-rate which on the broad average, has been practically as unshaken and immutable

ever since the figures have been collected as were the laws of the ancient Medes and Persians. As long ago as 1549, the city of Geneva, Switzerland, began the recording of births, marriages, and deaths in its own bailiwick, and made the startling discovery that 25.9 per cent of all its deaths each year were those of infants under one year of age. For this statement I have the authority of Mr. H. Llewellyn Heath's interesting book on "The Infant, the Parent, and the State," published in London about four years since. As Mr. Heath points out, as recently as 1904 the infant deaths in England and Wales constituted about twenty-five per cent of all the deaths of those countries in that year, and by examination and tabulation of the official records of the New York City Board of Health I find that the average ratio of infant deaths to total deaths for the last decade in the Boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx—the New York City of ante-consolidation days—has been between twenty-two and twenty-three per cent. Otherwise stated, in the face of the incalculable advance in the knowledge of pathology, hygiene and sanitation made in the last three hundred years, the infant mortality of such thoroughly civilized countries as England and the United States plays almost as commanding a part in the general death-rate of those countries as it did in that of far-away Geneva scarcely fifty years after Columbus discovered America, and that in the case of the metropolis of the new world which Columbus discovered, despite its veritable flood of charities, its philanthropic movements on lines almost innumerable, and all the admirable, and steadily-improving, work of its Board of Health!

I believe that the Day Nursery is destined to develop into one of the most important factors of the future in grappling with the infant mortality problem, the primary causes for which are ignorance and neglect. In part, at least, your work tends to dispel both. In the main, the mothers whose babies die like flies in their early months either do not know how to care for them, or by the stern decree of wage-earning necessity do not have the opportunity

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Address delivered at annual meeting of the Association of Day Ns series of New York City, January 28 1910, and reprinted from "American Motherhood," issue of February, 1911.

of caring for them. Your campaign is nothing if not educational on those lines, and nothing if not practical in the way of providing means of caring during the working hours of the day for the infants whose mothers have literally been forced to neglect them in so far as personal care is concerned.

The fact that breast-feeding is the foremost safeguard against infant mortality is universally conceded, and, even though the mother can not permanently continue to nurse her baby, were she to be able to nurse it for the few months immediately following its advent into this world its chances of

lation of the National Civic Federation, at Washington, I introduced a resolution recommending the enactment of such a law in all our manufacturing States—that is to say, debarring child-bearing women from work in factories and workshops for two weeks before, and at least eight weeks immediately following confinement—but the resolution impressed the Committee on Resolutions as too revolutionary a proposition, and it was promptly tabled. However, the entering wedge generally makes progress in the course of time, the advisability of some such law in this country has been discussed by quite a number



WHERE THE BABIES SLEEP.

living would be vastly increased. Consequently all authorities are agreed that child-bearing women should be flatly prohibited from working in factories, workshops etc., during the months immediately following their confinement. Most of the European countries have long had laws to that effect as part and parcel of their statute-books, but up to date in this country there is not a single line of such statutory prohibition to be found in the laws of a single one of the States. At the recent conference on uniform legis-

lation of people, and in my judgment it is only a question of time when the United States will get into line with Europe in this matter. America can not for all time lag behind the Old World in humanitarian movements of proven efficiency. In England, to be sure, the present law, originally enacted in 1891, is practically a dead-letter, owing to the insertion of the word "knowingly" in the prohibition against a factory owner employing a woman within four weeks after she has borne a child. But the shortcomings of the law have caused a

great deal of discussion, in and out of Parliamentary Papers, and some day that law in name will be made over into a law in fact.

In the case of child-bearing women who must work in order to keep themselves and their families alive, in the absence of some form of Day Nurseries there are but three alternatives, the baby must be utterly neglected during the day while the mother is working away from her home; it must be committed to the tender care of some old woman too old to secure other employment; or it must be left under the childish guardianship of another little one not yet old enough to follow in

of bread soaked in water, or any old thing that comes handy, and when they cry they get this sort of stuff (indicating with a sweep of his hand a dozen or more bottles of condemned soothing-syrups on his desk) with enough morphine or opiates in it to kill a whole family." What is the sole remedy for these horrible conditions under present economic conditions, practically making imperative the resumption of work at the earliest possible minute by many thousands, or hundreds of thousands, of women who have just brought babies into the world? I can conceive of but one, the Day Nursery.

Dr. George Newman's work on "Infant



CLEAN ONCE IN THE DAY, AT LEAST.

her mother's footsteps and go to work in the mill or shop. These three alternatives are equally alarming. The only room for doubt as to the treatment of babies left at home under such conditions as these is as to the detail of their neglect, or mal-treatment. That distinguished authority on the subject, Dr. Charles Harrington, the late Secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Health, once said to me in his office: "I will tell you what the babies of the millhands in the great factory towns of this State are fed on when their mothers are at work—orange-peel, crusts

Mortality" has brought out these facts as well as any book that I have ever seen, and is now a classic in the field of its subject. The doctor evidently senses the necessity for some competent substitute for the mother during her working hours, but in common with all men who have thought deeply on the subject holds that "no scheme of assisting maternity can ever have a wholesome effect, which lessens the sense of responsibility, or minimizes the essential value of personal service." I do not take it that this is a criticism of Day Nurseries, which permit

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THE DAY NURSERY

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the mother to retain all possible association with, and responsibility for, her infant, but rather it is to be construed as a sweeping and entirely justified condemnation of any wholesale, permanent, farming-out of the babies of working mothers.

The time may come—and I believe will come—in this country when employers of women in large numbers will follow the example of many factory-owners in France and Russia, and Italy, and establish Day Nurseries for the babies of their female employees. Of course less than one-fourth of the five million females of sixteen years and over in this country who, in round numbers, are classified as breadwinners, are working in factories and workshops, and by no means all of the mothers among those five million women would be reached by the establishment of nurseries for the infants of factory-working women—es-

of the more fortunate class of society. As yet but few people seem to realize that it is to that very class of less fortunate women that the world must look for its future population, but sooner or later we shall probably hear less about "the conservation of our national resources" in the form of coal, and iron, and forests, etc., and a good deal more about the conservation of our physical resources, the lives, young and old which alone prevent the final depopulation of this planet. As is well known, in practically all civilized countries the birth-rate is steadily declining, and one of the best authorities on that subject in this country recently expressed the deliberate conclusion that the old-time, pure-blooded, American stock was now actually dying out—in other words, that in the case of that stock the annual number of deaths already exceeded the annual number of



HOW THEY ARE FED.

pecially as only about thirty-five per cent of the factory-working women of this country at the time of the Twelfth Census were married, widowed, or divorced. Nevertheless, a general establishment of Day Nurseries for the benefit of child-bearing factory women in our large manufacturing cities could scarcely fail to cause a material reduction in the infant death-rate of those cities. And the demonstrated success of such an innovation would surely give an immense impetus to the Day Nursery movement.

As I have endeavored to make clear, it is the heavy mortality among the babies of the working women which is really responsible for the world's positively alarming infant mortality, the infant death-rate really being very low in the case

births. To offset this general decline in the birth-rate the well-known fecundity of women of the working class is the sole security, and it is to that class that this country must look for the great bulk of its population in the generations which are to come. If that hope is to be fulfilled, we most assuredly must devise some effective means of materially decreasing not only the high death-rate of their offspring, but the conditions whose direct effects are shown not only in the death of those babies who do succumb but in the deteriorated, and more or less anemic, condition of the babies who manage to struggle across the infant death-line, but start in child life utterly unfitted for the struggle which is before them, and especially unfitted to propagate their kind.

INTENTIONAL SECOND EXPOSURE

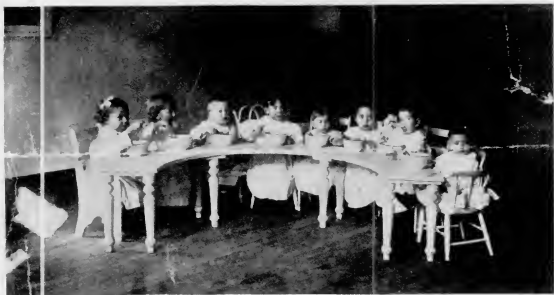
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